

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION
ON THE SITE OF

FORT DEARBORN

WACKER DRIVE AND MICHIGAN AVENUE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



MARCH 1971

THE SITE OF FORT DEARBORN Wacker Drive and Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois

Landmark Site (Legal description of property): Portion of land in West 1/2, Southwest 1/4, Fractional Section 10, Township 39 North, Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian (See page 7, "Plat of Survey" of the site, showing its relationship to existing streets.)

Throughout the existence of the first Fort Dearborn (1803-1812), the then narrow Chicago River turned sharply south at what is now Michigan Avenue and flowed into the lake at the line of Madison Street. The fort was located at this bend, with the river to the north and east. In 1834, an east-west channel was dredged from the lake to this bend, changing the location of the mouth of the river. (See page 8, showing both the original course of the river and the 1834 channel.)

Today the site of the fort is located at approximately the intersection of Wacker Drive and Michigan Avenue. The south entry gates would be in the middle of Michigan Avenue. One block house would be located just in front of the west facade of the 333 North Michigan Avenue Building, the other diagonally across at the island in the center of Wacker Drive, just west of Michigan Avenue.

Historical Significance of Site: When constructed in 1803, Fort Dearborn was the major fort on the western frontier protecting United States interests, especially those of the traders and early settlers. By building and manning the fort, the garrison, commanded by Captain John Whistler, established the authority of the United States government in this region. The entire area of what is now the State of Illinois was, in 1803, a part of Indiana Territory; it was not until February 1809 that the Illinois Territory was organized. No civil government was in existence at Chicago. The first authority, as at all frontier posts, was military—here at the fort. The officers and soldiers of Fort Dearborn, besides a few traders, were the only white people in the area.

The Louisiana Purchase had just been signed and the West was stirring to life in 1803. At this time Fort Dearborn was the farthest outpost of the United States and protected the region. Not only were the Indians resisting the advance of the United States, but foreign powers still contended for control of the Mississippi River, to which this area was the key. Clearly a fort was desirable at the point where the traffic of the Great Lakes ended and the portage to the Mississippi River began. One was built. Fort Dearborn became an important link in the chain of communication by water between the East and the West. Natural conditions marked it as a seat of power even in the wilderness.

Fort Dearborn became a rallying point for traders and settlers to the West and to Chicago itself. The building of the post drew additional traders to the area, where security offered by Fort Dearborn was supplemented by opportunities to trade with the garrison.

From Fort Dearborn grew the second largest city in the United States, Chicago.

Physical Description of the Fort: (See pages 6 and 9, which show the locations of the various structures that made up the fort.) Construction of Fort Dearborn began in July 1803 and was substantially completed in 1808. A plan drawn by Captain Whistler shows the complex as a basic quadrangle, containing a parade ground, around which were arranged the buildings of the post. Two blockhouses were placed diagonally at the northwest and southwest corners of the square. From these the garrison was defended. The whole fort was surrounded by a double line of palisades about twelve feet high, arranged so that the blockhouses might command the space outside the four walls as well as the area between the two rows of palisades. The inner walls were 120 feet to a side. A main gate was centered in the south wall. The distance from the northwest corner of the stockade to the Chicago River was 80 feet. On the north side an underground passage, used as an escape route and a passage to obtain water, led from the parade ground to the river bank.

The blockhouses and the barracks which surrounded the parade grounds were of notched logs. The barracks were two stories high, had shingled gable roofs, covered galleries, and were placed centrally on each side with the commandant's quarters on the east and those of his subordinates directly opposite. The soldiers' barracks flanked either side of the south gate. Between these buildings and the northwest blockhouse was the small brick magazine, the only structure not burned by the Indians when the fort was evacuated in 1812. There was also a small storehouse in the northeast corner and another structure diagonally opposite it.

Officers' gardens were to the south of the fort and an Indian graveyard to the east. Also outside the stockade there were a number of civilian houses. (See page 10, showing one artist's conception of the location of the fort and the houses to the north, across the river from it.) To the west of the fort and fronting north on the river was a two-story log building covered with split oak siding. It was the house of the United States Indian Agent, who had charge of relations with the Indians and all goods distributed to them. In addition, there was the "Factory", one of the government trading houses established in the West. These trading houses were used as a means of breaking British control of the Indian trade, weakening English influence among the tribes, and cultivating friendly relations with the Indians by supplying their wants with superior goods at reasonable prices.

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF SITE:

August, 1795: General Anthony Wayne, by the Treaty of Greenville, terminated a war with the Indians that had raged in the Northwest for a number of years. This treaty ceded to the United States a tract of land six miles square at the mouth of the Chicago River, where a fort formerly stood. What this fort was or who had erected it is a matter of conjecture.

1798: Rumors were circulated that a garrison would be stationed at what is now Chicago.

March 9, 1803: Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War under President Thomas Jefferson, issued instructions for the establishment of a fort at the mouth of the Chicago River.

April 30, 1803: The Louisiana Purchase was completed.

July, 1803: Lieutenant Swearingen was ordered to proceed with the company of Captain John Whistler (grandfather of the painter, James A. McNeil Whistler) to build a fort on the Chicago River. Whistler and his family came by boat. Swearingen took the overland route, keeping complete records of his journey. Upon arrival, construction of the fort began under the direction of Captain Whistler. Swearingen returned to Detroit. Later in the summer, the fort was ready for occupancy and its garrison took possession of the barracks and dwellings within the stockade. The fort was named in honor of General Henry Dearborn.

1803-1811: The relationship between the whites in and around Fort Dearborn and their Indian neighbors was generally harmonious from the first occupation of the fort until 1811, when Tecumseh became active in stirring the western tribes to oppose the settlement of western lands by white people.

1810: Captain John Whistler, after serving for seven years as commandant at Fort Dearborn, was ordered to another post early in the summer of 1810. His successor at Fort Dearborn was Captain Nathan Heald.

June 18, 1812: Captain Heald received, from General Hull at Detroit, an order to evacuate Fort Dearborn and proceed via Fort Wayne to Detroit, leaving it to the discretion of Heald to dispose of the public property as he saw fit. Officers at the fort distributed some goods, but disposed of the liquor and destroyed any extra ammunition. This infuriated the Indians, and undoubtedly was the cause of the massacre.

August 15, 1812: Except for the small brick magazine, Fort Dearborn was destroyed by the Indians.

August, 1816: The second Fort Dearborn was built and regarrisoned under the supervision of Captain Hezekiah Bradley. All traces of the first fort were removed when the second fort was built on the site.

October, 1823: By an order of May 27th of that year, all troops were withdrawn.

1828: By an order of August 19th, the fort was regarrisoned.

March 31, 1831: The fort was ordered evacuated.

1832: The fort was regarrisoned by an order of February 23rd. During the Black Hawk War, the fort was used as a hospital and a base of operations against the Indians.

December 29, 1835: Fort Dearborn was taken over by the Superintendent of Harbor Works and was used by various government departments.

April 23, 1839: The location of Fort Dearborn was surveyed and platted as the Fort Dearborn Addition to Chicago. The total area was 53¼ acres, ¾ acres less than the area that had been marked on the original official plat. It is supposed that the diminished area was due to changes in the shoreline of the lake. Lots in the addition were sold at public auction.

1857: With the exception of a few buildings adjacent to the blockhouse, including the officers' quarters, Fort Dearborn was torn down. Most of the remaining buildings were purchased by Judge Henry Fuller and moved to the corner of State and 33rd Streets, where they stood for many years. Although Judge Fuller razed the buildings, the logs were preserved because of their historical significance. They were given to the Chicago Historical Society in 1912. On the main floor of the Society is a partial replica of the blockhouse from Fort Dearborn. Its outer wall contains these remaining old logs.

1871: If there were any buildings remaining, they were destroyed by the fire of 1871.

1872-1911: A building was erected on the site and occupied by the William Hoyt Company. The first floor was sublet to a saloon keeper.

1881: A tablet was unveiled, marking the site of Fort Dearborn. (The tablet was removed in 1919,) It read, in part:

In 1816 it was rebuilt, but after the Black Hawk War it went into gradual disuse and in May, 1837, was abandoned by the army, but was occupied by various government offices till 1857 when it was torn down excepting a single building, which stood upon this site till the Great Fire of October 9, 1871. At the suggestion of the Chicago Historical Society this tablet was erected by W. M. Hoyt, November, 1880.

1911-1922: The property was sold to John S. Miller, who sold it to the London Guarantee Company. The Hoyt Building was torn down.

1922: The London Guarantee Company Building was constructed. (It is now called the Stone Container Corporation Building.)

1933: A replica of Fort Dearborn was built at 26th Street and the lake for the Century of Progress Exposition. Numerous errors in duplication were pointed out by H. A. Musham, Chicago historian.

1934-1940: The replica of the fort stood vacant and ramshackle until it was destroyed by fire in 1940.

1939: The City Council approved a resolution establishing a commission to mark properly the site of Fort Dearborn. Harry A. Musham was appointed chairman.

The following action has been taken to commemorate Fort Dearborn:

A tablet was placed by the Illinois Society of the Colonial Dames of America at the southwest corner of Wacker Drive and Michigan Avenue, on the Stone Container Corporation Building. It has a representation of the fort at the top and reads:

Here stood old Fort Dearborn, 1803-1812

An outline of the approximate location of Fort Dearborn has been made in the pavement of the area.

A fourth star was added to the flag of Chicago.

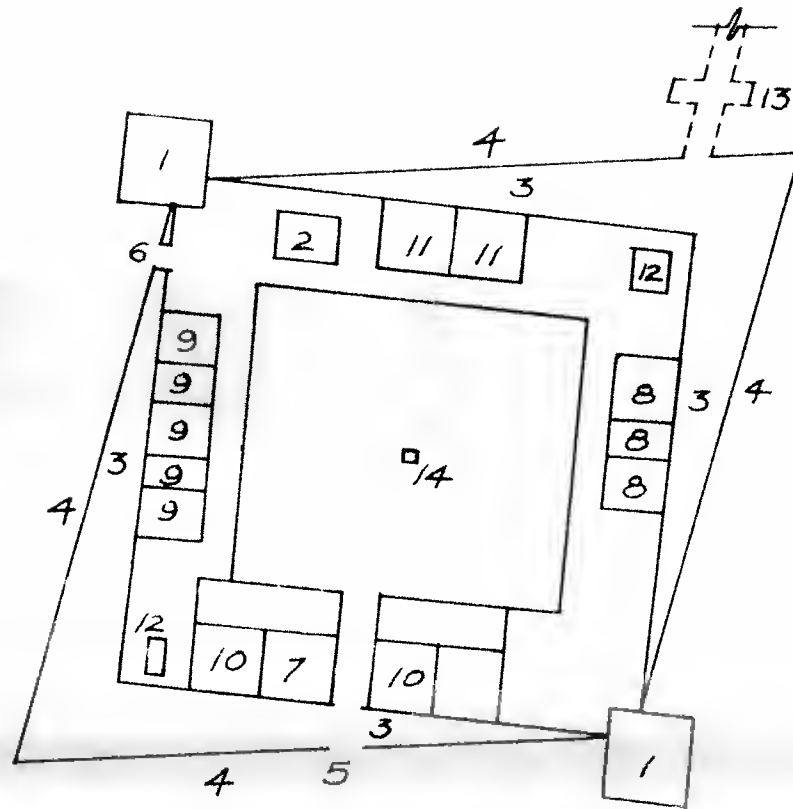
A square at the intersection of Wabash Avenue and Wacker Drive was named after Captain Nathan Heald, commander of the fort at the time of the massacre.

A flagpole was erected to fly a replica of the Fort Dearborn flag. (The flagpole has been removed for the extension of Wacker Drive.)

By order of the City Council, commemoration of Fort Dearborn is to be held each year on March 9, known as Fort Dearborn Day.

The sculpture on the southwest pillar of the Michigan Avenue Bridge was placed in 1928 to commemorate the Fort Dearborn massacre.

The landings at the corners of the Michigan Avenue Bridge are named after heroes of Fort Dearborn.





Plat of Survey

B. A. FENGER

Land Surveyor

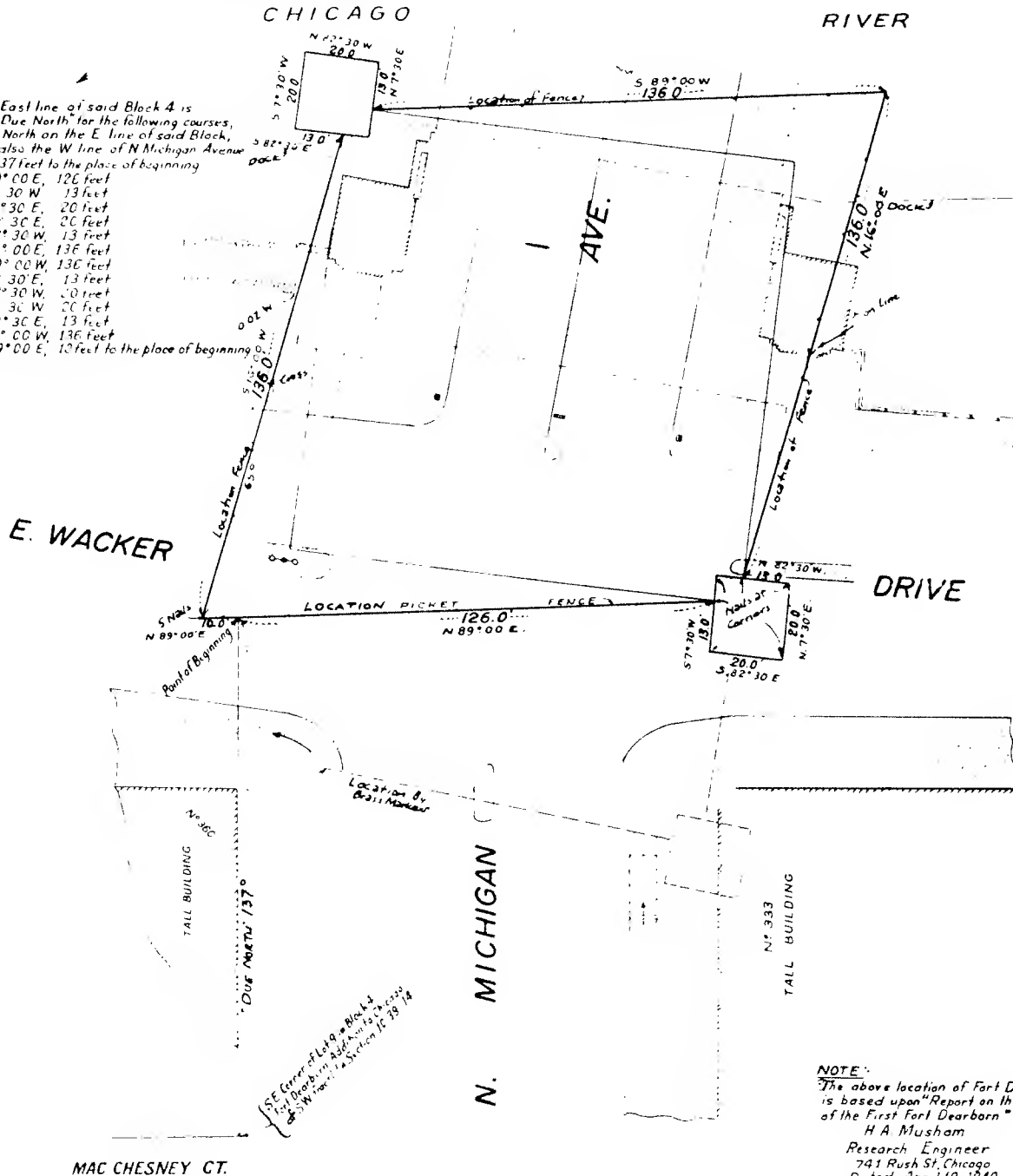
173 W Madison St
Chicago 2, Illinois

Phone State 2 2763

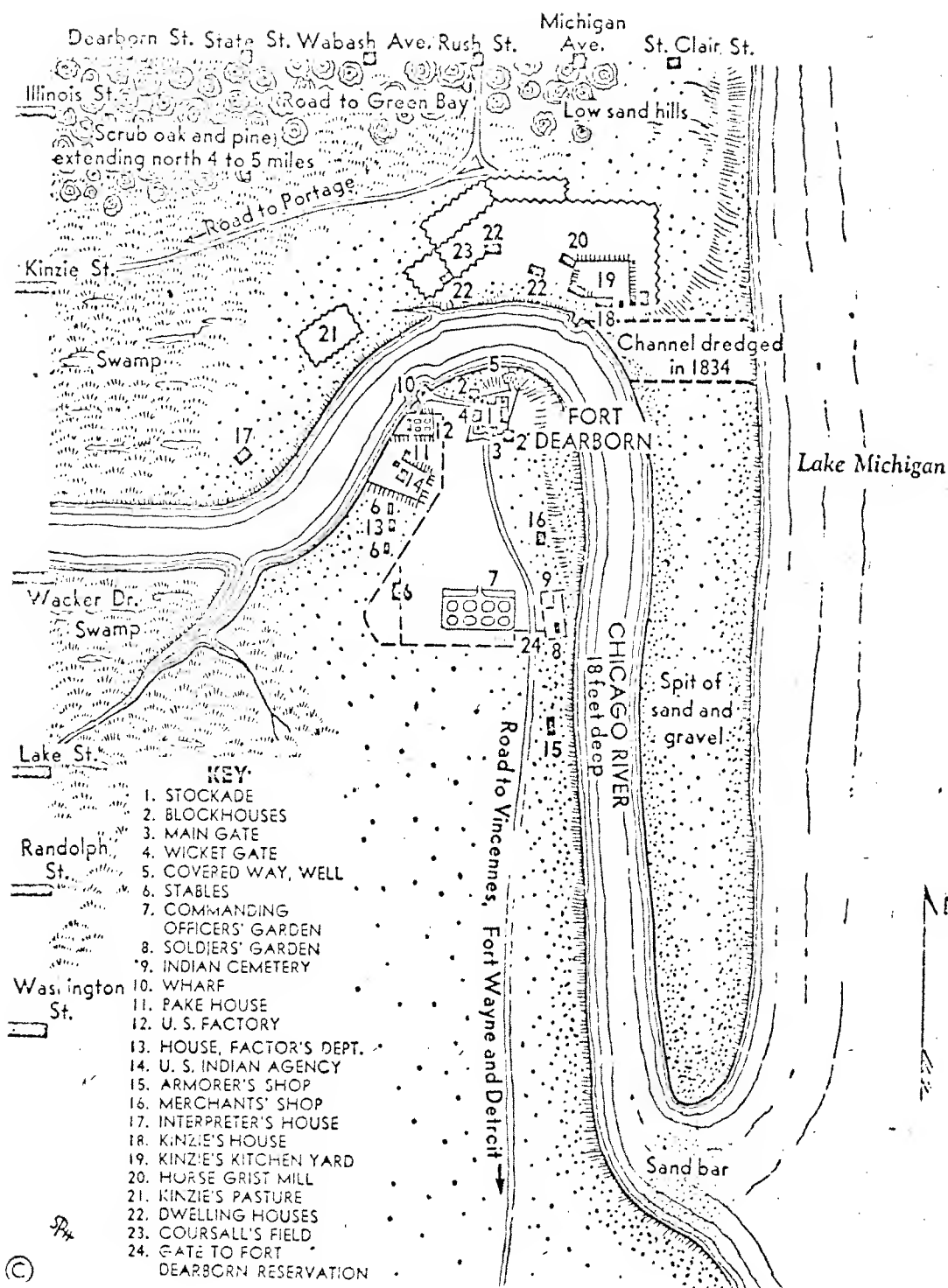
A parcel of land in the South fractional half of Section 10, T.39N, R.14E of the 3rd Principal Meridian, described as follows:-
Beginning at the SE corner of Lot 9 in Block 4 in Fort Dearborn Addition to Chicago, a Subdivision in the SW fractional 1/4 of Section 10, T.39N, R.14E of the 3rd Principal Meridian, in Cook County, Illinois,
(LEGAL CONTINUED)

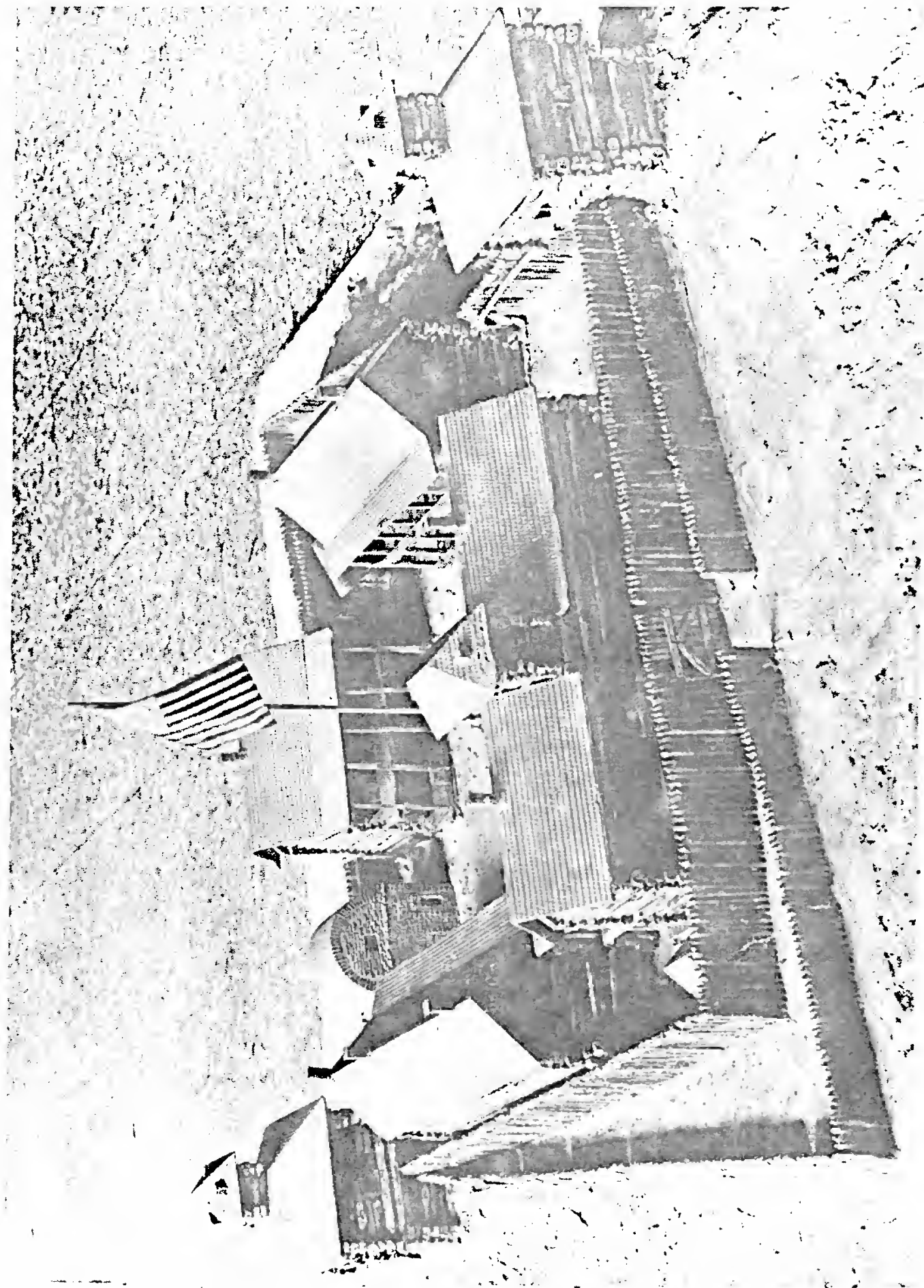
NOTE: The East line of said Block 4 is assumed as "Due North" for the following courses, Thence Due North on the E. line of said Block, said line being also the W line of N Michigan Avenue a distance of 137 feet to the place of beginning

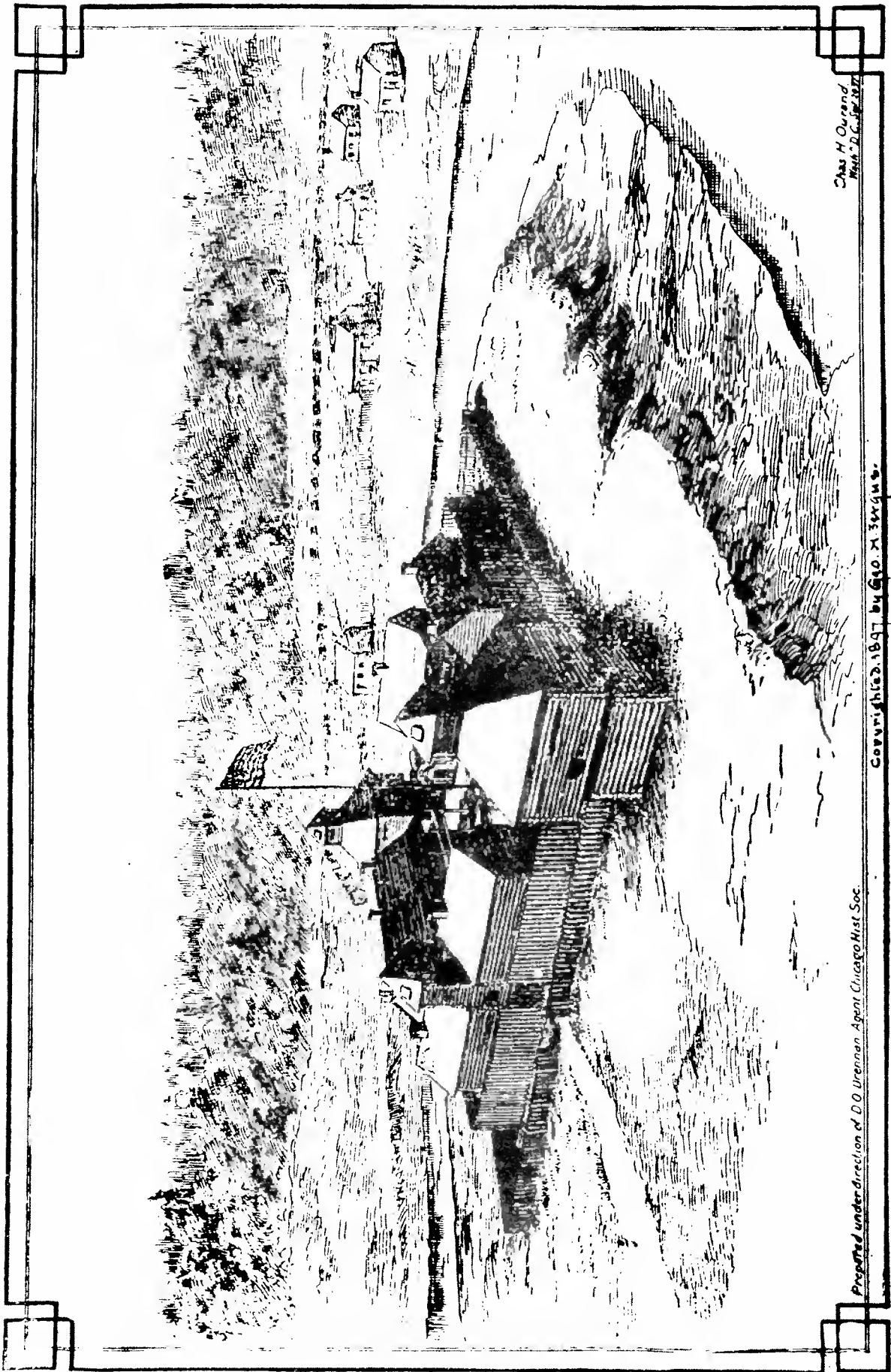
- thence N 89° 00' E, 126 feet
- " S 7° 30' W, 13 feet
- " S 82° 30' E, 20 feet
- " N 7° 30' E, 20 feet
- " N 82° 30' W, 13 feet
- " N 16° 00' E, 136 feet
- " S 89° 00' W, 136 feet
- " N 7° 30' E, 13 feet
- " N 82° 30' W, 20 feet
- " S 7° 30' W, 20 feet
- " S 82° 30' E, 13 feet
- " S 16° 00' W, 136 feet
- " N 89° 00' E, 10 feet to the place of beginning



NOTE:
The above location of Fort Dearborn is based upon "Report on the Location of the First Fort Dearborn" by H. A. Musham
Research Engineer
741 Rush St, Chicago
Dated April 10, 1940







Chas. H. Oursend
Wash. D.C. Apr. 1897

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